

I. Amendments to the Claims:

1. (Canceled)

2. (Currently amended) An ~~[[The]]~~ intervertebral support system ~~of claim 1,~~
~~wherein the~~ comprising:

a center portion dimensioned to be positioned in an intervertebral space, said center portion having top and bottom recesses in the center portion are generally centrally located mid-way along the length of the center portion and facing generally cranially and caudally when the center portion is positioned within the intervertebral space;

a top portion having a bottom recess facing generally caudally which interlocks with the top recess in the center portion when the top portion is positioned on top of the center portion within the intervertebral space; and

a bottom portion having a top recess facing generally cranially which interlocks with the bottom recess in the center portion when the center portion is positioned on top of the bottom portion within the intervertebral space.

3. (Currently amended) An ~~[[The]]~~ intervertebral support system ~~of claim 1,~~
~~wherein the,~~ comprising:

a center portion dimensioned to be positioned in an intervertebral space, said center portion having top and bottom recesses facing generally cranially and caudally when the center portion is positioned within the intervertebral space;

a top portion having a bottom recess in the top portion and the top recess in the bottom portion are generally centrally located mid-way along the length of the respective top portion and

bottom portions and facing generally caudally such that the bottom recess will interlock with the top recess in the center portion when the top portion is positioned on top of the center portion within the intervertebral space; and

a bottom portion having a top recess generally centrally located mid-way along the length of the bottom portion and facing generally cranially such that the top recess will interlock with the bottom recess in the center portion when the center portion is positioned on top of the bottom portion within the intervertebral space.

4. (Currently amended) An [[The]] intervertebral support system of claim 1,
comprising:

a center portion dimensioned to be positioned in an intervertebral space, said center portion having top and bottom recesses facing generally cranially and caudally when the center portion is positioned within the intervertebral space, wherein one end of the center portion is tapered downwardly from a top surface and upwardly from a bottom surface;

a top portion having a bottom recess facing generally caudally which interlocks with the top recess in the center portion when the top portion is positioned on top of the center portion within the intervertebral space; and

a bottom portion having a top recess facing generally cranially which interlocks with the bottom recess in the center portion when the center portion is positioned on top of the bottom portion within the intervertebral space.

5. (Currently amended) An [[The]] intervertebral support system of claim 1,
comprising:

a center portion dimensioned to be positioned in an intervertebral space, said center portion having top and bottom recesses facing generally cranially and caudally when the center portion is positioned within the intervertebral space;

a top portion having a bottom recess facing generally caudally which interlocks with the top recess in the center portion when the top portion is positioned on top of the center portion within the intervertebral space; and

a bottom portion having a top recess facing generally cranially which interlocks with the bottom recess in the center portion when the center portion is positioned on top of the bottom portion within the intervertebral space,

wherein each of the top, center and bottom portions have side grooves extending along opposite sides thereof, the side grooves each being adapted to receive a prong of a positioning tool therein.

6. (Currently amended) An ~~[[The]]~~ intervertebral support system ~~of claim 1,~~
~~wherein, comprising:~~

a [[the]] center portion [[has]] dimensioned to be positioned in an intervertebral space, said center portion having a generally flat top surface, [[and]] a generally flat bottom surface, a top recess formed in the top flat surface facing generally cranially when the center portion is positioned within the intervertebral space, and a bottom recess formed in the bottom flat surface facing generally caudally when the center portion is positioned within the intervertebral space;

a [[the]] top portion [[has]] having a generally flat top surface and a bottom recess facing generally caudally which interlocks with the top recess in the center portion when the top portion is positioned on top of the center portion within the intervertebral space; and

~~, and the~~ a bottom portion ~~[[has]]~~ having a generally flat bottom surface and a top recess
facing generally cranially which interlocks with the bottom recess in the center portion when the
center portion is positioned on top of the bottom portion within the intervertebral space,

~~such that~~ wherein the top flat surfaces in the center portion and the top portion are
generally co-planar when the top portion is positioned on top of the center portion, and wherein
the bottom flat surfaces of the center portion and bottom portion are generally co-planar when
the bottom portion is positioned under the center portion.

7. (Original) The intervertebral support system of claim 6, wherein each of the top
and bottom surfaces have a plurality of small grooves formed therein, the grooves increasing
sliding friction across the top and bottom surfaces.

8. (Previously Presented) An intervertebral support system, comprising:
a center portion having top and bottom recesses;
a top portion having a bottom recess, the bottom recess in the top portion interlocking
with the top recess in the center portion when the top portion is positioned on top of the center
portion; and
a bottom portion having a top recess, the top recess in the bottom position interlocking
with the bottom recess in the center portion when the center portion is positioned on top of the
bottom portion, wherein the top and bottom portions are positioned parallel to one another and
perpendicular to the center portion when the top portion is positioned on top of the center portion
and the bottom portion is positioned under the center portion.

9. (Currently Amended) ~~[[The]]~~ An intervertebral support system ~~of claim 1,~~
~~wherein each of the top and bottom portions have,~~ comprising:
a center portion dimensioned to be positioned in an intervertebral space, said center
portion having top and bottom recesses facing generally cranially and caudally when the center
portion is positioned within the intervertebral space;

a top portion having a tapered end and a bottom recess facing generally caudally which
interlocks with the top recess in the center portion when the top portion is positioned on top of
the center portion within the intervertebral space; and

a bottom portion having a tapered end and a top recess facing generally cranially which
interlocks with the bottom recess in the center portion when the center portion is positioned on
top of the bottom portion within the intervertebral space,

[[and]] wherein the top and bottom recesses in the center portion each comprise ramp
portions which are dimensioned to engage the respective tapered ends of the top and bottom
portions such that the center and top portions can be respectively slid over the bottom and center
portions with the recesses in the top and bottom portions interlocking with the respective
recesses in the center portion.

10. (Original) The intervertebral support system of claim 9, wherein the tapered ends
of each of the top and bottom portions assist in advancing the top or bottom portion into a snap-
fit position over the top and under the bottom recesses in the center portions.

11. (Currently amended) An ~~[[The]]~~ intervertebral support system ~~of claim 1,~~
comprising:

a center portion dimensioned to be positioned in an intervertebral space, said center portion having a generally elongate shape with top and bottom recesses facing generally cranially and caudally when the center portion is positioned within the intervertebral space;

a top portion having a generally elongate shape with a bottom recess facing generally caudally which interlocks with the top recess in the center portion when the top portion is positioned on top of the center portion within the intervertebral space; and

a bottom portion having a generally elongate shape with a top recess facing generally cranially which interlocks with the bottom recess in the center portion when the center portion is positioned on top of the bottom portion within the intervertebral space,

wherein the top and bottom portions are held against the center portion such that the recesses in the top and bottom portions interlock with the recesses in the center portion by pressure exerted between adjacent vertebrae.

12. (Currently amended) An ~~[[The]]~~ intervertebral support system ~~of claim 1,~~
comprising:

a center portion dimensioned to be positioned in an intervertebral space, said center portion having a generally elongate shape with top and bottom recesses facing generally cranially and caudally when the center portion is positioned within the intervertebral space;

a top portion having a generally elongate shape with a bottom recess facing generally caudally which interlocks with the top recess in the center portion when the top portion is positioned on top of the center portion within the intervertebral space; and

a bottom portion having a generally elongate shape with a top recess facing generally cranially which interlocks with the bottom recess in the center portion when the center portion is positioned on top of the bottom portion within the intervertebral space,

wherein each of the top, center and bottom portions ~~of the support assembly~~ are dimensioned to be ~~received~~ introduced into the intervertebral space through ~~8mm~~ surgical cannulae having an inner diameter of at least 6 mm.

13. (Canceled)

14. (Currently amended) The intervertebral support system of claim ~~[[1]]~~12, wherein the top and bottom portions are interchangeable.

15. (Currently amended) The intervertebral support system of claim ~~[[1]]~~12, wherein the top, center and bottom portions are made from bone allograft.

16. (Currently amended) The intervertebral support system of claim ~~[[1]]~~12, wherein the top, center and bottom portions are made from metal.

17. (Currently amended) A method of supporting adjacent vertebrae, by assembling an intervertebral support assembly between adjacent vertebrae, comprising:

providing a bottom portion having a generally elongate shape with a top recess, a top portion having a generally elongate shapes with a bottom recess, and a center portion having a generally elongate shape with a top recess and a bottom recess;

advancing the center portion into a patient's intervertebral space such that the top and bottom recesses face generally cranially and caudally within the intervertebral space;

advancing the top portion into the patient's intervertebral space such that the bottom recess faces generally caudally within the intervertebral space and interlocks with the top recess of the center portion; and

advancing the bottom portion into the patient's intervertebral space such that the top recess faces generally cranially within the intervertebral space and interlocks with the bottom recess in the center portion.

18. (Previously Presented) A method of supporting adjacent vertebrae, by assembling an intervertebral support assembly between adjacent vertebrae, comprising:

advancing a bottom portion having a top recess into a patient's intervertebral space;

advancing a center portion having top and bottom recesses into the patient's intervertebral space; and

advancing a top portion into the patient's intervertebral space, wherein the top portion has a bottom recess which interlocks with the top bottom recess in the center portion, and the bottom portion has a top recess which interlocks with the bottom recess in the center portion such that a top surface of the top portion is generally coplanar with the top surface of the center portion, and such that a bottom surface of the bottom portion is generally coplanar with the bottom surface of the center portion, wherein the bottom portion and the top portion are advanced in a first posterolateral approach and the center portion is advanced in a second posterolateral approach, wherein the first posterolateral approach is generally perpendicular to the second posterolateral approach.

19. (Previously Presented) A method of supporting adjacent vertebrae, by assembling an intervertebral support assembly between adjacent vertebrae, comprising:

advancing a bottom portion having a top recess into a patient's intervertebral space;

advancing a center portion having top and bottom recesses into the patient's intervertebral space; and

advancing a top portion into the patient's intervertebral space, wherein the top portion has a bottom recess which interlocks with the top bottom recess in the center portion, and the bottom portion has a top recess which interlocks with the bottom recess in the center portion such that a top surface of the top portion is generally coplanar with the top surface of the center portion, and such that a bottom surface of the bottom portion is generally coplanar with the bottom surface of the center portion, wherein the intervertebral support assembly has an X-shape.

20. (Original) The method of claim 17, wherein each of the top, center and bottom portions are advanced into the patient's intervertebral space through minimally invasive surgical procedures.

21. (Currently amended) The method of claim 17, wherein the top, center and bottom portions are advanced into the patient's intervertebral space through surgical cannulae [[have]] having an interior diameter not exceeding 8 mm of at least 6 mm.

22. (Canceled)

23. (Original) The method of claim 17, wherein each of the top, center and bottom portions are individually supported by a surgical tool having two prongs, and wherein each of the top, center and bottom portions has side grooves dimensioned to receive one of the two prongs therein.

24. (Original) The method of claim 17, wherein positioning each of the top, center and bottom portions in the patient's intervertebral space assists in prying apart adjacent vertebrae.

25. (Original) The method of claim 17, wherein positioning any of the top, center and bottom portions comprises:

advancing a tapered end of the portion over a ramp surface on an adjacent portion, the ramp surface on the adjacent portion being disposed within a recess on the adjacent portion, wherein a corresponding recess on the portion interlocks with the recess on the adjacent portion.

26. - (Currently amended) An intervertebral support system, comprising:

a bottom portion having a generally elongate shape with a top recess facing generally cranially when the bottom portion is positioned within an intervertebral space; and

a top portion having a generally elongate shape with a bottom recess facing generally caudally and interlocking with the top recess of bottom portion when the top portion is positioned on top of the bottom portion within the intervertebral space.

27. (Currently amended) A method of supporting adjacent vertebrae by assembling an intervertebral support assembly between adjacent vertebrae, comprising:

providing a bottom portion having a generally elongate shape with a top recess,
and a top portion having a generally elongate shape with a bottom recess;

advancing the bottom portion into a patient's intervertebral space such that the top recess faces generally cranially; and

advancing the top portion into the patient's intervertebral space such that the bottom recess faces generally caudally and interlocks with the top recess on the bottom portion.